



courts had rejected expert testimony from leading AIDS researchers from outside Libya. While earlier in the conversation, the doctor complained about Libya's abysmal state of public health, health education and service, when it came to the AIDS investigation, she insisted that Libyan doctors and equipment were world-class and capable of conducting a thorough investigation.

18. (C) Similarly, the head of the Tuberculosis prevention program for the General People's Committee of Health, a doctor who lived and studied in Budapest for seven years before returning to Libya also said he believed the Benghazi HIV infections were deliberate. When P/E Chief ran through a list of medical reports issued by internationally-recognized experts, including Libyan expatriate medical specialists, and offered other explanations for the outbreak, the doctor was not receptive to any citations of scientific studies.

19. (C) Last year P/E Chief had dinner in Benghazi with a working-class family with one son in medical school. Asked about the case and local Benghazi opinion, the future doctor said that "everyone" in Benghazi knew the infections were deliberate and that if the medics were released it was a sign that the government was corrupt and bowing to pressure from the West.

110. (C) In late November the charge had a conversation with a Libyan doctor now living outside Libya but who returns from time to time to provide consultative services to the government. The doctor gave many examples of the declining quality of the education available in Libya's medical schools, and cited the absence of quality control in the educational system. He then told the charge that he had been asked to write a report about AIDS and its treatment, with reference to the Benghazi problem. At first his interlocutors had been reluctant to provide him requested data, and remained vague as to whether the report was to be read by specialists or by laymen or someone in between. After persistent questioning the doctor finally ascertained that the report was to be prepared for Muammar Qadhafi. The doctor concluded that Qadhafi was intensely interested in this technical issue and was following the Benghazi case closely. The doctor made it clear to the charge that he did not believe the Bulgarian nurses were guilty of intentionally infecting the children but it was not clear how much of this conclusion was conveyed in the report he wrote.

111. (C) COMMENT: The disconnect between the public rhetoric of health policy officials and the often privately-acknowledged admittance that the HIV infection was not a deliberate criminal act by the medics reflects the deep threat felt by the authoritarian regime. There are a number of factors influencing the government's current stance that outsiders are to blame for the HIV infections in Libya. Religious, social and cultural stigmas make it very difficult to admit that behaviors or practices that contribute to the spread of HIV may exist in Libya. The government also, given Benghazi perceptions that it receives less than a fair share of state resources, has to manage public opinion. It is not willing to accept responsibility for the lack of basic hygiene, sanitation, equipment or adequately trained staff in state-run facilities. The government's image problems became even more tangled after its initial attempts to blame the outbreak on outsiders, (at one time claiming U.S. and Israeli intelligence services were behind

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a plot to kill Libyan children). After 8 years of blaming outsiders, now the government also faces heavy criticism from oppositionist forces, especially conservative Islamic groups, who decry the government falling under the influence of western forces. While some Libyan officials acknowledge privately and confidentially that they know the HIV outbreak was not a deliberate, criminal conspiracy they have not found a way to manage the situation in a way that protects the Libyan regime from damaging criticism. The cognitive dissonance on HIV awareness makes it extremely difficult to manage public opinion that prevents a quick solution in the Medics case.  
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